"Paul Farmer is one of the most extraordinary people I have ever met. A brilliant doctor and teacher, he tirelessly works for the poorest of the poor, insisting that they deserve the very best care that is available. He not only changes individual lives, but massive systems, proving against overwhelming objections that his methods are not only what Christian compassion demands, but that they bring about effective cures. Jennie Weiss Block will make you fall in love not only with Paul, but with the beloved people to whom he is so passionately committed. This is not a book you can put back on the shelf after reading; it will move you to take the next step in your own commitment to accompany the poorest in our world."

—Barbara Reid, OP
Professor of New Testament Studies
Catholic Theological Union

"It is rare that readers get to explore the lives of legendary people while they are still with us making this book a precious gift. One of the greatest physician-scholar-activist servants in American history, Paul Farmer is a powerful model of service to the poor. The world has much to learn from his life and witness. For anyone with a heart for the vulnerable, the poor, and the underserved, this thoughtful new text about an extraordinary human being is an inspiration and must-read."

—Bryan Stevenson
Director of Equal Justice Initiative and author of *Just Mercy*

"Some say that the devil is in the details, but in the life of Paul Farmer, there's grace in those details! Whether he's living in Haiti, Liberia, Rwanda, or Cambridge, channeling the corporal works into weapons of mass salvation, or running with the preferential option for the poor, Paul's life exudes the call that's so tangible in these pages. His friend and spiritual adviser, Jennie Weiss Block, captures it all in her compelling account when she asks us, 'How do you say no to someone who takes the Gospel so seriously?' Read this beautiful book and see if you too don't find yourself saying, 'Yes!'"

—James F. Keenan, SJ
Canisius Professor, Boston College

Paul Farmer

Servant to the Poor

Jennie Weiss Block

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> If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.
>
> Meister Eckhart

Anyone who has written a book knows two things. First, while writing is a mostly solitary endeavor, the process of bringing a book to fruition requires assistance from many people. Second, writing a book requires a significant amount of focus and energy, along with huge blocks of time apart. This inevitably means that there will be times when the writer will be unavailable, and this time apart can cause, at the very least, some inconvenience or perhaps even some hardship, especially to those who are closest to the writer. Thus, with great gratitude, I would like to recognize the many people who fall into these two categories—those who assisted me in bringing this book to completion; and my family, my religious community, and my friends—for their support, understanding, and good humor during the many months I worked on this book.

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mystery of God's love each and every day. I hope you will someday understand that our work on behalf of poor and marginalized people is done in large measure because we want you to inherit a world where stories of poverty and oppression are found only in history books.

And, finally to Paul Farmer: Thank you for making me believe that it is possible to build the kingdom of God on earth.

Jennie Weiss Block, OP
Miami, Florida
May 25, 2018
Feast of St. Madeline Sophie

Introduction

> Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, . . . cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."
>
> Luke 10:8-9

> The idea that some lives matter less is the root of all that is wrong with the world.[1]
>
> Paul Farmer

Once in a great while, you meet someone who makes you believe that it is possible to build up the kingdom of God in the here and now. For me and many others, Dr. Paul Farmer is such a person. A simple story well illustrates my point.

Ten years ago, I spent several days in rural Haiti observing Paul build a garden in the center of a hospital complex in Lascahobas, only about forty-eight miles from Port-au-Prince but a two-to-four-hour drive depending on the weather and road conditions. The La Colline hospital, owed by the Haitian government, built and operated by Partners In Health (PIH), is reached by traveling down a partially paved road over mostly rugged terrain made worse during the rainy season by the thick mud. After bumping down the entrance road,

you come upon the long, one-story white hospital building set back on the left. It is a big hospital with an ambulatory care clinic, multiple examining and treatment rooms, and a pharmacy. Adjacent to the main building are several other smaller buildings, including an x-ray lab, a dental clinic, and a big kitchen where meals are prepared for the patients and no doubt many people from the surrounding neighborhood.

Entering the hospital under a wide covered porch, you pass through a set of attractively designed and locally made black wrought-iron gates. A large foyer leads to a center courtyard that, during my visit, was being transformed before my eyes into a beautiful garden for the patients and families at the hospital. On the far end of the garden was a large, three-sided wrought-iron bench that would soon be covered with thick vines for shade. Paul Farmer believes that trees and flowers and fishponds are an important and necessary part of the hospitals he helps build to serve the poorest people in the world. "Hospitals for the rich have beautiful gardens and landscaping . . . Why shouldn't hospitals for the poor?" he explained. Paul himself had drawn detailed plans for the garden on a large piece of white paper. He stopped frequently to unroll the paper and discuss the plan with his Haitian coworkers, two of whom had been trained in agriculture. Sitting in the area opposite the bench was the *pièce de résistance* of the garden—a huge, and I do mean huge, rock. As the already-growing legend has it, Paul spotted this rock, at least five feet in diameter, on the roadside miles from the hospital. Some seventy men were paid to move the rock to the hospital, where it now sat inside the garden wall on the edge of what would soon be a fishpond.

Over several days, Paul and his coworkers transformed the bare, dirt-floored courtyard into a lovely garden. The plants, trees, soil, and gravel all needed to be brought in over

the rough roads from Port-au-Prince. Working conditions in Haiti are difficult; neither promised goods nor promised delivery times are assured. But the patient garden builders were not to be deterred, and slowly but surely the garden took shape. Flowers were planted, and heavy white stones, edged with monkey grass, were laid to form a path to the sitting area, which was then filled with gray gravel. Bushy bamboo trees appeared in the corners behind the giant rock. Asparagus ferns and bromeliads were nestled in the crevices of the rock. Thick bushes with red ginger blossoms filled in the area behind the rock, surrounded by bushes with little blue flowers. Spindly-armed plants were formed into a little bog, and a bright green, flowering ground cover was laid. Workers planted night-blooming jasmine in back of the benches so the patients could enjoy their sweet scent. A pump hidden under the greenery attached to a hose that ran through a piece of bamboo made a waterfall into the pond.

Dr. Farmer and his coworkers truly believe that nothing is too good or too much trouble for the poor. The extraordinary thing is that Paul and his colleagues at Partners In Health, the nonprofit he cofounded thirty years ago, care for eight *million* patients a year in Haiti and eleven other countries around the world with the same love, skill, and commitment I saw being poured into the building of this garden.

The raising of the garden was a major community happening. Every day, more and more Haitians from the local area gathered around the low wall to watch as their garden took shape. The ways in which this hospital and this garden change the lives of the community cannot be underestimated. The "dignity of every human person" is not just an ideological phrase but a tangible reality for Paul Farmer. All who enter through the iron gates receive medical care, free of charge, on par with the medical care provided in the hospitals affiliated

with Harvard University, where Paul is a professor of medicine. No one who comes to this hospital languishes and dies from a treatable medical condition. Those who would have been doomed to certain death from malaria, tuberculosis, or HIV/AIDS instead receive state-of-the art treatment and medications. Routine medical care that the rich take for granted is available, and babies, even premature ones, are delivered safely. Jobs are created, the local community is empowered, drinkable water flows, and the deepest of human hungers is assuaged with both food and compassion.

The sense of joy during these garden-building days was palpable. The Haitian minister of health stopped by to see the progress, and a meal of rice, beans, and plantains appeared which seemed to multiply, New Testament–like, to feed the crowd. Ever thoughtful, Paul stopped his work to help me plant a tree in front of the hospital in memory of my husband Sandy, to mark the sixteenth anniversary of his death.

Late one afternoon as twilight drew near, Paul hopped up on the huge rock to survey the progress. As he stood there, in wrinkled clothes and a baseball cap, hands dirty from planting in the thick black soil, the crowd broke out into spontaneous applause and cheering. When he grinned and gave the thumbs up sign, I looked at Paul, and the newly planted flowers and trees, and the smiling faces of my Haitian brothers and sisters, and was overwhelmed with joy because I knew I was standing on holy ground and the kingdom of God was at hand. Yes, the kingdom of God in the here and now, being built upon a big rock where a community of hope will gather under a green canopy, in a garden filled with the scent of jasmine and the sound of a trickling waterfall.

Who is Paul Farmer? And what is it about him that makes one believe that it is indeed possible to build up the kingdom

on earth? By any standard, his credentials and accomplishments are outstanding. Educated at Duke and Harvard, Dr. Paul Farmer is the Kolokotrones University Professor at Harvard University. He is a professor of medicine, and the chair of its Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School, and the chief of the Division of Global Health Equity at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Cofounder of the noted nonprofit organization Partners In Health, Dr. Farmer also serves as a special adviser to the secretary-general of the United Nations. The list of honors and awards Dr. Farmer has received goes on for pages in his ninety-five-page curriculum vitae. His intellectual gifts are extraordinary, but he is able to articulate complex ideas in an accessible way. He has authored hundreds of scholarly articles and authored or coauthored fifteen books. Tracy Kidder's best-selling book *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World* (which has sold over 1.5 million copies and has been translated into 9 languages) introduced Paul Farmer and the work of PIH to a worldwide audience. Most recently, his work has been featured in the award-winning documentary *Bending the Arc*. Sometimes referred to as a "nonprofit celebrity," Dr. Farmer is a hero and inspiration to many and often draws crowds in the thousands when speaking on college campuses.

All kinds of people are attracted to Paul, sensing in him something that is "not of this world." Although he is often called a saint, he would surely not refer to himself in this way—and I do not wish to paint an overly romantic picture of him. Like all people, including holy ones, he is complex and not without faults and idiosyncrasies, which he himself is often quick to point out. To his credit, he does not shy away from being "human," nor does he cling to any suggestion of

perfection. A charismatic leader, Paul Farmer is charming and fun to be around—he has a great sense of humor—and is able to motivate and challenge people to be their best selves. He is kind and generous, always giving people the benefit of the doubt or making excuses for behavior that others find off-putting or unacceptable. He doesn't just give people a second chance, but sometimes a third or fourth, often annoying his colleagues. Sensitive and humble, he possesses an ability to observe keenly and listen intuitively that allows him to connect with people at a deep level. Determined and passionate, he can be demanding and exacting. Like many people who labor in the global health world, he struggles to find a work-life balance and time with his family, given his demanding travel schedule and the urgency of providing medical care for people whose lives depend on it. His decisions and actions are shaped by the moral demands of the Gospel of Jesus, which he takes with the utmost seriousness. His life's work among the destitute poor is a tangible sign of God's love and mercy and reveals him to be a person who believes in and experiences transcendence.

Writing this book presented me with three challenges. First, in a spirit of full disclosure, let me mention that I have had a close personal and professional relationship with Paul for over a decade, with all the privileges and biases this implies. My relationship with Paul Farmer began in April of 2005, when, of all things, I gave him some used furniture. I was introduced to Paul by our mutual friends, Lanny and Behna Gardner, whose daughter Abbey had worked with Paul in Russia in the late nineties. Lanny is a Harvard-trained doctor and at the time was the chief of medicine at the University of Miami. Behna is a professional photographer. Friends close to Paul and his wife, Didi Bertrand, were concerned about their financial future and suggested that

owning a home would be a good decision both financially and personally. Paul and Didi decided they wanted to live in Miami, only a short flight from Haiti, where they both worked, and they asked Behna to help them with the process of finding and purchasing a house. Behna found the house online and showed it to Didi and Paul, and they liked it. The house was the first, and only, financial investment Paul has ever made. He was in the habit (and still is) of giving all his money away to the poor even faster than he earns it. Situated on a nice piece of property, the house was modest but comfortable for the family. Paul loved the many trees and the dense tropical landscaping and envisioned a garden and a fishpond. His first and only purchase for the new house was a big tree fern.

Behna had told me something about her wonderful doctor friend who was dedicated to the poor, and my sister had read *Mountains Beyond Mountains* and thought Paul and his work were fantastic. I didn't have time to read the book, as I was busy doing research in preparation for writing my doctoral thesis while also getting ready to move, downsizing to a much smaller home as my last child left for college. Grateful for Paul's work with the poor, I thought to ask Behna if the Farmer family were in need of any furniture. Since Paul's only purchase had been a plant, and the house was empty save for a mattress on the floor, Behna, on behalf of Paul, accepted my offer. Truth be told, while I was pleased to give some furniture to a doctor who served the poor, I wasn't particularly interested in meeting him. I thought he might be the type that "believed his own PR," if you know what I mean. One afternoon, several months after I delivered the furniture, Paul's mother, Ginny, called to invite me over to dinner so they could thank me for the furniture. Not wanting to be rude, I stopped by for what I thought would be a brief visit.

Along with Paul and Ginny, Paul's sister Katy and her husband Bob were there too, and they all greeted me warmly. Paul was sitting in a chair in the living room reading when I arrived. As he put his book down to stand up to greet me, I glanced down and saw the title of the book he was reading: *Selected Writings* by Meister Eckhart. Eckhart (1260–1328) was a German Dominican friar, brilliant theologian, and mystic. Erudite, profound, and dense, Meister Eckhart is not an easy read and definitely *not* what someone who believes his own PR would be reading. I couldn't help but ask, "You are reading Meister Eckhart?" "Trying to, but it is not easy," was Paul's humble reply. All these years later, we both still thank Meister Eckert for bringing us together.

Over the following years, I developed a great friendship with Paul and Didi and the Farmer and Bertrand families. My friendship with Paul is grounded in the spiritual life, and he often refers to me as his spiritual adviser (his "interior decorator," as he likes to joke). Our relationship has a pragmatic side—I soon became involved in supporting the work of Partners In Health. Four years later, in 2009, with much trepidation—I suppose because he knew the demands it would place on me—Paul asked me to come and work with him. The job was supposed to be a short-term assignment, but nine years later, I am still working as his chief adviser with responsibility for a wide range of policy and administrative functions. The kind of work we do is not really a job; I think of it more as a lifestyle, as it permeates all aspects of one's life. Now all the members of my family, even my young grandchildren, are involved in our work in one way or another.

Since 2009, I have traveled extensively with Paul throughout the developing world and have had the opportunity to observe him in many different contexts. Some of the stories

and experiences shared in this book are ones I have observed firsthand. Of course, sensitivity is always required when exploring or revealing another's interior life, especially when the subject is still living. While Paul has given his blessing to this writing project (albeit hesitantly and with some embarrassment) and we agreed that he would not read the book prior to publication, I am aware that I have had access to Paul's innermost thoughts and feelings and have knowledge of personal situations that only a close friend would or should be privy to. I have thus taken care to respect certain boundaries while not compromising the honesty and openness a book of this type requires.

Second, while it is widely known that Paul's work has been influenced by theological thought, especially liberation theology, and the story of Paul's life and work has been well told both in *Mountains Beyond Mountains* and more recently in *Bending the Arc*, the ways in which Paul's faith and interior life shape who he is have not been publicly or openly explored in any explicit way. Those close to him are aware of his vivid religious imagination, his love of the liturgy, the Eucharist, and religious iconography, and his frequent use of religious language and religious symbolism in his daily life. And while Tracy Kidder points out that the way Paul interprets meaning is often "fundamentally religious,"[2] Paul rarely speaks of his personal faith in public settings; as Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, OP, aptly puts it, "Dr. Farmer is a bit shy and reluctant to expound on theology and spirituality."[3] Nevertheless, his embrace of a radical Christianity organized around a "preferential option for the poor" affects every dimension of his life. I approach sharing this aspect of Paul's life with a keen sense of responsibility and with the hope that I can do justice to describing the lived experience of his Christian faith, the depth of his

spiritual life, and the ways in which the paschal mystery, especially the suffering of the Crucified One, informs his thoughts and actions.

My third challenge, and perhaps the most difficult, was my struggle to determine just what the purpose and focus of this book should be. Paul's peripatetic life and significant accomplishments in the field of global health are well documented (far better than I could ever hope to do) in Tracy Kidder's wonderful book *Mountains Beyond Mountains* (if you have not read it, you should) and in the beautiful documentary film *Bending the Arc,* released in 2017 (if you have not seen it, you should). His academic accomplishments have been recognized with Harvard's highest designation of university professor, and his large corpus of writings—much of it quite scholarly—has a dedicated audience. While these aspects of his life and his attractive persona make for a highly engaging narrative, I believe that each of these perspectives ultimately falls short and doesn't adequately describe the Paul Farmer who somehow makes others believe that it is possible to build the kingdom of God in the here and now. Thus, my goal in this book is to tell the Paul Farmer story from a different perspective, one that uses the interpretive lenses of theology and spirituality to describe a humble man who takes the Gospel to heart, loves his neighbor as himself, and freely and unstintingly puts his life and his gifts at the service of the human community, especially the poor and marginalized among us.

To write a book that accomplishes this ambitious goal, especially within the length required by the publisher, it has been necessary to narrow its scope and carefully select what to include from a vast amount of information and source material. This inevitably means leaving out many significant events in Paul's life as well as important stories related to

CHAPTER ONE

A Bus, a Boat, and Some Big Ideas

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

My father was not a very orthodox guy. We actually lived in a tuberculosis bus for ten years. Back in the 60's, the public health service did TB screenings with mobile X-ray units. Then they sold them in public auctions, and my father, then a schoolteacher, bought one and moved in his eight family members. . . . This makes my biography sound a little too neat. I mean we grew up in a TB bus and I became a TB doctor. We worked picking citrus for about a nanosecond before my father admitted we could never make enough for us to live on, and years later I would [do the same] with Haitian migrant farmworkers. But it can be too neat and still be true, right?[1]

Paul Farmer

A God Dwelling Among Us

Paul and I were once talking about the incarnation. I was remarking about the utter mystery of a God who became human and "pitched his tent among us" when Paul grabbed a map of Haiti that was sitting on his coffee table, pointed to it, and said with great intensity, "I will show you how God is made flesh and living among us." He took a black Sharpie pen and drew the long route over which a desperately ill young boy was carried to the new, state-of-the-art teaching hospital that Partners In Health had just built in Mirebalais on Haiti's Central Plateau. A community health worker carried the boy on his back many hours over rough terrain from Léogâne to Mirebalais. Paul had been consulting on the case all day by phone with clinicians at the hospital, so the plight of this boy was on his mind. For Paul, God had again broken into human history through a sick child representing the spirit of Jesus in the flesh, crying out for help, through a Haitian peasant who loved his neighbor so much that he was willing to carry a sick child on his back for hours to save his life, and through the medical staff who stood ready to see Jesus' own face in the suffering child and give their all to save his life.

Paul grew up with two devout Catholic grandmothers; perhaps they planted the seeds of what would become his intense religious imagination. Second in a family of six children—three boys and three girls—Paul Edward Farmer Jr. was born on October 26, 1959, in North Adams, Massachusetts. His mother, Virginia Rice, dropped out of college to marry Paul Farmer Sr. when she was twenty years old, and had six babies in the following eight-year span. Years later, when the children were raised, she would return to Smith College and earn a degree in library science. In 1966,

when Paul was nine years old, the family moved south to Birmingham, Alabama, for Paul Sr. to pursue a job in sales. PJ, as his family called him, and his siblings attended church as children, and their parents dutifully made sure they received the sacraments of initiation, but religion did not play a big part in their family life. By the time they were teenagers, church attendance had fallen by the wayside, and for Paul, the Catholic Church seemed perfunctory. As he recalls, "To me and my siblings, church was a place one went to fulfill obligations to parents and grandparents: First Communion, Confirmation, high holy days. It meant sitting through homilies—often boring ones, I'm sorry to say, and almost always remote from our experience. Perhaps the priests made too little effort or felt little need to make the effort to address people our age; more likely, we made too little effort ourselves."[2]

A Bus and a Boat to Call Home

Paul's father, Paul Sr., was what one might refer to as a "character." A large man in both size and personality, he was, in his own way, devoted to his family, although the lifestyle he fashioned for them was anything but traditional. In Birmingham, the family lived in a modest house, but in 1971, Paul Sr. packed up the family again and moved to Brooksville, Florida, where the family took up residence in a big bus, a former tuberculosis mobile clinic, which the family christened with the cheerful name of The Blue Bird Inn. Paul Sr. drove the bus to a trailer park at the Brentwood Lake Campground, where the family would live for five years. The bus was fitted with bunk beds for the children, a small curtained-off area for the parents, and a kitchen table. They kept their belongings in boxes under the bunk

beds, and the entire family used the bathhouse at the campground. Paul's sisters have told me how difficult it was for them to live on the bus with little or no privacy or creature comforts, but the boys didn't seem to mind it as much and probably enjoyed exploring the nearby woods.

Paul's father got a job teaching math and English at the local public high school, which all of his children attended, and his mother, Ginny, worked as a cashier at a Winn-Dixie grocery store. Their family life didn't exactly fit the profile of what one might expect from their humble living conditions in a trailer park. There were high expectations for the children at school and at home; there was order and discipline, so much so that the girls nicknamed their strict father "the Warden." Reading was encouraged at home, the children were taken to the library to check out books, and the parents often read aloud in the evenings from Shakespeare and the classics. Despite the crowded quarters and the many practical inconveniences such as the lack of a bathroom or running water (which meant they had to use public bathroom facilities and fill empty milk jugs with water from an outdoor faucet at the local grocery store to carry home for drinking water), the Farmer family life was stable, and the children received lots of attention from both parents—unconditional love and support from their calm mother and active involvement in all aspects of their lives from their father. All in all, it was certainly a very unusual childhood, but in a *New York Times* interview Paul reflected, "When we were growing up in the campground, we were all sort of embarrassed by it, but I think all of us feel grateful to my parents for having liberated us from middle-class expectations."[3] And truth be told, none of the six Farmer children, all of whom have gone on to live productive and successful personal and professional lives, seem any worse for the wear.

Paul's intellectual gifts were apparent early, and he was placed in the "gifted" program in elementary school. By the fourth grade, he had become an avid reader, a habit that continues to this day. His favorite book was *The Lord of the Rings*. No doubt its religious imagery and symbolism appealed to his developing religious imagination, as did *War and Peace*, which he read for the first time when he was eleven years old.

About the same time Paul started at Hernando High School in Brooksville, his father moved the family to a boat that was moored at Jenkins Creek, a bayou on the Gulf Coast. Paul Sr. bought the boat at a public auction and named it *Lady Gin*, after his wife. It was an old Liberty Launch, about fifty feet long with holes that he repaired himself. He built a cabin with beds and a small living space, put in a generator, and hatched a plan that included using the boat both as the family home and as an income-producing commercial fishing boat. After several failed attempts at navigation out on the open waters, including a few incidents in stormy weather that scared Ginny Farmer, the boat was docked near land and the commercial fishing idea abandoned. There was a plank board to cross from dry land to the boat. Sometimes people ask why Ginny always went along with her husband's schemes, but as she told Tracy Kidder, "You didn't argue with Paul, Sr., you just didn't."[4] Paul would live on the boat with his family until he left for college. By all accounts, life on the bayou was not easy. They did not have running water, and the boat leaked when it rained; there was only a small fridge that had to be restocked constantly. His mother hated the bugs and roaches, and there were alligators in the swamp water. Paul didn't mind though, as he had—and still has—an affinity for reptiles and amphibians. He was happy too, that on a patch of land near the boat, he was able to plant his

first garden and build his first fishpond, financing the costs with money he earned at a part-time job as a bag boy at a local grocery store.

Paul's relationship with his father was not always easy. There was an expectation that the boys would excel in competitive sports. His two younger brothers, Jim and Jeff, were big guys, built like their father. Paul, of much slighter build, tried very hard to participate in the school sports programs as was expected. But he ended up falling short in this area, a source of embarrassment and disappointment during his teen years. His father, who clearly fiercely loved his children, was on the gruff side and tended to withhold approval, even though he was quietly proud of Paul's academic achievements and would often brag to others about him—but only when Paul was out of earshot. Perhaps some of Paul's deep compassion for others was learned from his father, who taught at an alternative school for "at-risk" youth in the last years of his life. He was also very involved as a volunteer at an organization that served people with disabilities, probably because of his experience with his younger brother, Paul's uncle James. Several of Paul's siblings have shared stories with me about their Uncle Jim. Jennifer Farmer, one of Paul's younger sisters, explained the relationship:

> Dad was the oldest of six. His younger brother (directly after him in the birth order), contracted German measles and suffered swelling of the brain, causing severe and permanent mental damage. Uncle Jim, as we all knew him, was stuck in a state hospital in Massachusetts because that's what parents did in that day. Dad was never comfortable with that. As soon as his father (Grampa Farmer) died, Dad flew to Massachusetts and pulled him out of the institution and moved him to a group home near us in Brooksville. Dad picked him up at the group home nearly

> every weekend and brought him home to stay with us on the weekends. Uncle Jim LOVED Dad and followed him around everywhere. When Dad died, Jim kept walking around trying to find him. It was terrible. He never understood where his big brother went.[5]

Paul Sr. insisted that Uncle Jim be welcomed into the family. Jim needed a great deal of support with daily activities, including dressing, bathing, toileting, and feeding, and his speech and communication skills were limited. Jennifer told me that her father always treated his brother with patience and compassion and expected the same from his children. As Jennifer puts it, "I know Dad was the first person that ever made Jim feel like he had a real family. I am sure this deeply impressed all of us. It's not that Dad ever said anything or preached about how we should take care of others who can't take care of themselves. It's just that he did it because he really loved his brother and he couldn't bear the thought of him being alone."[6]

Paul excelled in high school; his grades were excellent, and he was president of his senior class and very popular, especially with the girls. All of the Farmer children liked to participate in after-school activities and clubs, partly to avoid coming home to the cramped living quarters and the many chores their father had lined up for them.

In 2008, Paul returned to Brooksville to accept the honor of being named "Great Brooksvillian of the Year." Julia Jenkins, who nominated him, said she didn't think that he would come. "I thought maybe his mom would come and accept for him," Jenkins said of the award. "Instead, he not only accepted in person, but he was accompanied by his mother, Ginny, his daughter, Catherine, one of his sisters, and both brothers. Here he is, trotting around the globe,

saving lives, and he makes time to come back to sleepy old Brooksville."[7] There was a weekend of festivities, including a party organized by his high-school friends, many of whom he has kept in close contact with throughout the years, a ride in the city's annual Christmas parade, and the Great Brooksvillian presentation at city hall, followed by a fund-raiser that netted about fifty thousand dollars for Partners In Health. Paul enjoyed every minute of it.

On Saturday afternoon, there was a book-signing event in the library. The line snaked around the building, and many of his high-school teachers came to see their former student. He greeted each and every person from his high-school years, remembering everyone's name. He did not rush anyone, stopping again and again for a picture or to recall a story about his relationship with the person, including thanking the registrar for giving him a pass to get into class without penalty when he was late to school.

One of the people who came to the book signing was his high-school guidance counselor, Wendy Tellone, to whom Paul owes a great debt of gratitude, for she was one who sensed in a young Paul Farmer much potential. She helped him apply to Duke University, where he was given a full scholarship. Paul jumped up to hug her, and she was just beaming. Needless to say, she let everyone know she was not at all surprised by his intellectual achievements and professional success.

Duke: The Birthplace of Some Big Ideas

Paul arrived at Duke in the fall of 1978. He was eighteen years old, excited to be away from home and out from under his father's strict watch. He was unsophisticated and curious, ready to take on the big world beyond rural Central

Florida. Given his unconventional childhood living conditions, a bedroom with his own closet, indoor plumbing, and hot showers were new experiences. He immediately took advantage of the wide variety of cultural and social opportunities offered and went, for the first time in his life, to the theatre and art galleries. He joined a fraternity, where he learned to party, even becoming the social director; however, he ended up resigning because he didn't want to belong to an all-white organization. One of his fraternity brothers was John Dear, who would become a Jesuit priest and an internationally known peace activist.

Paul was initially taken with the affluence he encountered in many of his Duke classmates, impressed by the trappings of wealth some of his friends enjoyed. However, in time as he got his bearings, he realized that the perks of wealth didn't really hold his interest or attention. He was much more interested in ideas, relationships, and service to others. He instinctively knew that accumulating wealth would not ever satisfy his deepest longings, and as he matured, he came to understand that he was much better suited for a life of service.

Paul's genuine interest in other people and total lack of pretentiousness, which he still maintains, made him very popular among his peers. Among the many friendships he formed at Duke was with Todd McCormack, who would become one of the cofounders of Partners In Health and is among Paul's closest friends to this day. Godfather to several of Anne and Todd McCormack's children, Paul has his own room in the McCormack home in Newton, Massachusetts, where he stays when in Boston. Todd just smiles and shakes his head when he finds Paul in his closet borrowing his socks and shirts just as he did during their college days. These days, Paul is on friendly terms with many billionaires who generously support his work at Harvard and Partners In Health,

and while he is very grateful for their friendship, he still has no interest in accumulating wealth, nor does he put any effort into building his financial future. Many of his wealthy friends find this both admirable and a little disconcerting.

Paul spent some months in Paris during his junior year. He explored the city, soaked in French culture and history, and discovered his facility for languages, picking up French quickly. He studied with the famed anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, and his first international experience continued to broaden his worldview.

Paul's four years at Duke were profoundly formative and set the course for the rest of his life, especially in two significant ways: first, through his intellectual growth; and second, through a series of adult conversion experiences. He was a perfect candidate for the rigorous academic coursework offered at Duke and ripe for mentoring by faculty who no doubt saw extraordinary promise in him. He met progressive activists who awakened him to social and economic issues and challenged his thinking and worldview. Reading voraciously, he encountered the thinking of great minds by studying a wide range of disciplines, including social medicine, pathology, anthropology, sociology, political science, and history. He read books that, as he so aptly puts it, "cracked my mind open."[8] He started out as a biochemistry major but changed his major to medical anthropology in his junior year because his coursework in anthropology "just opened a whole new world."[9]

Paul was particularly influenced by the work of Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902), a brilliant and accomplished German physician who is often referred to as the founder of social medicine. Along with his medical practice, Virchow was also an anthropologist, a pathologist, a biologist, a writer, and

an editor, and he is recognized for advancing the fields of pathology and public health. While Virchow's scholarly writings no doubt made an impression on Paul, it was Virchow's synthetic model of integrating multiple disciplines and linking scholarship with implementation that captured his imagination. Paul would go on to emulate Virchow in his own work, forging a discipline that integrates medicine and anthropology with praxis.

A Faith Worth Dying For

There comes a time for many, perhaps most, Catholics when they must leave behind the faith of their childhood—no matter how good or bad the religious formation was—and decide whether they will embrace the faith in their adult lives. Some decide to move on, leaving the church and the faith behind. Others, often because of an adult conversion experience, see the Christian faith in a new way and make it their own. While at Duke, Paul had a series of adult conversion experiences that revealed to him a dimension of the faith that changed his ideas about the Catholic faith and the church. A seminal event occurred on March 24, 1980, the terrible day Archbishop Óscar Romero was gunned down while celebrating Mass in a hospital chapel in San Salvador, El Salvador. Paul describes it this way: "I stood in front of the Duke Chapel with more than a hundred fellow mourners, gathered in shock to grieve for the murder of Romero. He had been cut down in the middle of Mass while intoning the very words, no doubt, that had recently seemed to me so dull and uninspiring."[10] He once told me that during the candlelight vigil, as he contemplated Romero's life and death, he internalized the idea that there was a radical edge to Christianity that some embrace even unto death; it is "a

faith worth dying for," in Paul's own words. Or, as he told Tracy Kidder, "Wow! This ain't the Catholicism that I remember."[11]

The first of many significant relationships with religious people that Paul would develop over the years began at Duke when he met Sr. Julianna DeWolf, a "social justice nun," as he affectionately refers to her. She and a group of sisters from her congregation were working with the United Farm Workers on behalf of the migrant farm workers in the area, many of whom were Haitians. Paul volunteered with Sr. Julianna's group and saw firsthand the terrible conditions that migrant workers endured in their labor camps. Paul was impressed with the work ethic of the sisters; Sr. Julianna was hard-core, willing to do any job that was needed, no matter the cost, and fearless when standing up to injustice. As he told Tracy Kidder, "They were the ones standing up to the growers in their sensible nun shoes. They were the ones schlepping the workers to the clinics or courts, translating for them, getting them groceries or driver's licenses."[12]

When Sr. Julianna took the time to take Paul on tours of some of the migrant camps, he had another conversion of sorts, experiencing what Belgian Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx calls a "negative contrast experience." Negative contrast experiences occur when we encounter a situation where human suffering is occurring and we know what we are seeing is terribly wrong, especially when we are forced to compare it with another, more positive experience with which we are familiar. This experience often creates a sense of moral outrage and drives people towards working for justice. In Paul's case, he saw his life at Duke—with its many comforts, unlimited opportunities, and access to the goods and services that make human flourishing possible—standing in stark contrast to the miserable lives of the mi-

grant workers living just a few miles away with almost no opportunity. He was upset; it made him anxious because he knew he was seeing great injustice, although he did not yet understand the complex social and economic forces that create systematic injustice and oppression.

Talking to some Haitians he met in the migrant camps piqued Paul's interest in Haiti, and he began to read Haitian history and culture. It was around this time that Paul was also introduced to liberation theology and the notion of a preferential option for the poor. He began to read Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino, and other Latin American theologians who would come to have a significant influence on his thinking and his medical work. Liberation theology is a theological movement rooted in the social movements for freedom that arose in Latin America in the 1960s. Liberation theology seeks to interpret the Scriptures and the Christian tradition in light of efforts to overcome the scandal of poverty and oppression. Taking the view "from below"—that is, from the perspective of the poor—liberation theology attempts to identify the "structural sins" that create terrible poverty for billions of people in the world and contrasts this reality with the kingdom of God that Jesus preached. Liberation theology challenges individual Christians, the church as a whole, and even non-Christians to make a preferential option for the poor, to work towards eliminating unjust structures and conditions, and to build a more just world. While liberation theology has provoked a good bit of controversy, the church's magisterium has affirmed its useful and necessary role.

All in all, his years at Duke were an extraordinary time of intellectual, personal, and spiritual growth, and Paul remains deeply grateful to Duke, where he is a now a member of the board of trustees and a generous donor to the scholarship

programs that offer others the life-changing opportunity he was afforded. Another Duke graduate, Melinda Gates, was the 2013 commencement speaker, and she had this to say about Paul:

> Paul Farmer, the Duke graduate I admire most, is a testament to the deep human connection that I am talking about. As many of you know, Paul, who is here today, is a doctor and a global health innovator. I first met Paul in 2004, when I went to see him in Haiti. It took us forever to walk the 100 yards from our vehicle to the clinic because he introduced me to every single person we met along the way. I am not exaggerating. Every single person.
>
> As we moved along, he introduced each person to me by first and last name, wished their families well, and asked for an update about their lives. He hugged people when he greeted them and looked them in the eyes through each conversation. If you believe love plays a role in healing, there was healing happening at every step of that journey.
>
> When we finally reached the waiting area outside the clinic, I saw a lovely garden with a canopy of flowering vines. Paul told me he built it himself, for two reasons. First, he said, it gets hot, and he wants his patients to be cool in the shade while they wait. Second, he wants them to see what he sees, the beauty of the world, before they have to go into the clinic for treatment.[13]

Paul graduated from Duke on a sunny day in May of 1982. Unlike many young people who have no idea what they want to be or do, Paul had a very clear idea of how he wanted to spend the rest of his life. He claims that he knew he wanted to be a doctor from the time he was quite young. "I always wanted to be a doctor, I say always. Why on earth? I don't know. In fact, I never really met any doctors when I was young. I never received any real medical care, except for

when I broke my arm and that was like an hour in the emergency room. And that was it. So I must have been enchanted with the idea of being a physician. I certainly was set on it by the time I went off to college."[14] His ideas about how he was going to practice medicine developed at Duke and were influenced by his great mentor, Virchow, and his comprehensive vision of integrating medicine, anthropology, and praxis.

Paul notes that he chose anthropology, specifically medical anthropology, much more carefully, much more thoughtfully, than he made his youthful decision to become a doctor. Anthropology appealed to him because it was both a process that revealed meaning and a way to pay attention to and understand the complex realities of people's lives. It taught him to search "for how people are socialized, what worldviews, cosmologies, understandings, beliefs, praxis they bring to their everyday life."[15] His ideas about the kind of medicine he wanted to practice were informed by liberation theology, with its view of the world from the perspective of the poor, and the unmasking of the structural sin that creates the crushing poverty that billions of people endure. He had no doubt that making a preferential option for the poor with the goal of lessening human suffering would be his life's work. Although he would likely not put it in these terms, he was developing what I would call an "unconventional piety." By this, I mean a *rugged spirituality* (like that of Óscar Romero) that finds its meaning in a revolutionary, radical commitment; a *compassionate spirituality* (like that of the militant nuns in the migrant camps) that is rooted in Jesus' commandment to love your neighbor as yourself; and an *intense spirituality* (like that of Gustavo Gutiérrez) rooted in the willingness to encounter the face of the Crucified One in the faces of the suffering of the world's poor. Over time, as Paul embraced and internalized his religious experiences,

his faith deepened into an *action-oriented spirituality* rooted in the deep desire to tend and mend the world's wounds by bringing the medicine of expert mercy to his suffering brothers and sisters.

In May of 2005, at a commencement address at Boston College, Paul would tell the graduates what had been clear to him on his own graduation day, twenty-three years earlier: "You will—you must—find out about the world's wounds. My own guess is that poverty and powerlessness and untreated disease are hell on earth and that there is nothing God-given about such conditions. They are 'man'-given. And if hell can be created by human beings rather than some inescapable force of God or nature, we humans might just have a salvific role to play."[16]

What was not exactly clear on that sunny day in May of 1982 when Paul graduated from Duke was where, how, and with whom he would make his lofty moral goals come to fruition. But he did not let the unknown dampen his motivation or enthusiasm as he set out into the world.

CHAPTER TWO

The Corporal Works of Mercy

Weapons of Mass Salvation

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Matthew 25:37-40

Partners In Health is a secular organization, but all of us embrace the corporal works of mercy laid out clearly enough in the Gospels (Matthew 25:34). These are not vague injunctions. Feed the hungry. Give drink to the thirsty. Clothe the naked. Shelter the homeless. Visit the sick. Visit prisoners. Bury the dead.[1]

Paul Farmer

I read last week that the current US administration has spent $191 billion on wars in the Middle East. Imagine if we had even half of that war chest, the mere bagatelle of $95.5 billion, for weapons of mass

> salvation. In contrast to certain Weapons of Mass Destruction, these weapons do exist. They are vaccines and programs of prevention and care; they are decent sanitation and enough to eat. And don't you wonder if attacking the social problems of the bottom billion might be a more effective means of expunging terrorism than some of the current strategies being employed?[2]
>
> Paul Farmer

Fr. Gerry and the Blood Run

On Christmas Day in 2005, Paul called me from his mother's house in Orlando to ask me for the exact wording and citation from Matthew's gospel when Jesus is asked, "Lord, when was it we saw you sick and in prison?" He needed the citation for an article he was writing, entitled "Christmas in a Haitian Jail," that was subsequently published in the *Miami Herald* on January 2, 2006, telling the world of the plight of Fr. Gérard Jean-Juste, a seriously ill political prisoner in Haiti. Fr. Gerry, as he was affectionately called, was a Catholic priest, defender of the Haitian poor, and revolutionary of sorts, often in trouble with the church hierarchy for infractions such as conducting funeral services for refugees who had drowned at sea, regardless of their religious background. Sometimes referred to as the Martin Luther King Jr. of Haiti, Fr. Gerry was someone Paul considered a good friend.

In mid-December, Paul had gotten word that Fr. Gerry's health was deteriorating. He had swelling on both sides of his neck that he initially thought was due to a beating he had received in jail. But now the swelling was increasing, he had swollen lymph nodes elsewhere, and he was very

fatigued. Paul was really worried. He decided that he must go to the prison during his trip to Haiti the following week; he hoped he could get into the prison, examine Fr. Gerry, and draw blood for testing. Paul was getting significant resistance to this plan from friends and colleagues who believed, with good cause, that even attempting to visit, let alone examining Fr. Gerry and drawing blood, was a terrible idea as well as a dangerous mission. But Paul was not to be deterred. On the morning of December 23, Paul left Cange at four o'clock in the morning for the long drive back to Port-au-Prince. He arrived at the prison around nine o'clock, planning to take the two o'clock flight back to Miami. He was not sure if the prison would let him see Fr. Gerry, but he managed to talk his way in and afterwards called me on his way to the airport. Fr. Gerry had insisted on some singing and praying and then allowed Paul to do a quick examination and to surreptitiously draw two vials of blood while other prisoners distracted the guards. Paul asked me, "Do you think you can find a doctor in Miami who can help with a diagnosis? I was only able to get two tubes of blood, and time is of the essence as the blood will not hold up for long." How do you say no to someone who takes the Gospel so seriously?

There were many obstacles. It was late in the afternoon two days before Christmas, not exactly the best time to be seeking immediate medical assistance. Paul was entering the United States with contraband blood belonging to a controversial political figure, and there were other sticky matters such as patient confidentiality and the problem of payment for a series of very expensive tests. A brilliant University of Miami hematologist and an old family friend, Dr. Y. S. Ahn, was pressed into service and agreed to help. As soon as Paul landed, he went straight to the hospital, where

Dr. Ahn was waiting outside for him. It was growing dark, and things were shutting down for the holiday, but Dr. Ahn promised to run the tests himself and get back to us as soon as possible. Two hours later, Dr. Ahn called and gave Paul a diagnosis: acute chronic lymphocytic leukemia. Both doctors knew that with proper treatment, Fr. Gerry had a good prognosis. However, because this type of cancer can quickly develop into a more aggressive type, Fr. Gerry needed immediate treatment.

Paul called the prison, and given the news he was reporting, he was allowed to speak to Fr. Gerry. He told him of his diagnosis and the plans to bring him to Miami for treatment, although exactly how Paul was going to get him out of prison and to Miami was unclear. Various human rights groups, including Amnesty International, and forty-two members of the US House of Representatives, led by Maxine Waters, had been calling for Fr. Gerry's release from prison for months to no avail, but the report of his deteriorating health gave the situation added urgency.

Paul was certain that the only person who could assist with Fr. Gerry's release was Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, so we turned to another family friend, Republican Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. She surely knew of Fr. Gerry's situation, as it had been receiving widespread publicity, so at Paul's urging, I gathered my courage and sent her an e-mail asking if she would be willing to help. She was on a ski vacation with her family and responded quickly on her Blackberry with the following message. "I am not a big fan of his but if he is your friend, I guess he is my new best pal." One never quite knows what goes on behind the scenes in political matters, but a week later Paul's colleague Harvard doctor Jennifer Furin was on her way to Haiti to escort Fr. Gerry to the States for medical treatment

at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami. His treatment was rigorous and exhausting but successful, and eight months later, his doctors pronounced him in remission.[3]

Growing in Grace, Courage, and Compassion

How does one become the kind of person who takes the corporal works of mercy so seriously that he is willing to go into a Haitian prison to draw blood from a critically ill prisoner knowing full well that this act could have disastrous personal consequences? What kind of formation makes a person bold enough to write an editorial in a major newspaper calling out injustice without regard for possible damage to one's own standing and reputation? And willing to ask one's friends to help no matter the imposition or cost? What is the wellspring of this kind of courage and compassion?

The qualities of courage and compassion, so evident in the mature Paul Farmer, were not yet fully formed when Paul graduated from college, but rather took shape and emerged in a slow awakening. Disparate events, both positive and negative, along with what can only be called grace-filled experiences and relationships, would form him morally and educate him in virtue. After graduating from Duke in May of 1982, Paul took what is now referred to as a "gap" year. He had hoped to head to Africa to pursue some ethnographic work. He often tells students today not to give up when things don't go their way; he shares how he applied for a Fulbright Scholarship to go study and work in Africa and didn't even get an interview, so he ended up going to Haiti instead. The students all love this story; it is along the same lines as Michael Jordan being cut from his college basketball team.

When Africa didn't pan out, Paul decided to spend his gap year in Haiti, while he was applying to medical school.

He had become interested in Haitian history and culture at Duke and planned to try to view the country using his anthropological and ethnographic training as well as volunteer in a medical setting as he prepared to attend medical school. Before his trip to Haiti, he had completed a short postgraduate fellowship at the University of Pittsburgh, where he met a member of the Mellon family, the founders and supporters of the Hôpital Albert Schweitzer in Deschapelles, Haiti. The Schweitzer Hospital was a modern facility, at least by Haitian standards, and Paul decided he would try to get a job there.

In the spring of 1983, when he was twenty-four years old, Paul made his first trip to Haiti. When he stepped off the plane into the heat and chaos of Port-au-Prince, he had a thousand dollars in his pocket and had taught himself a little Creole. Little did he know that this was the start of a relationship with all things Haitian that would profoundly and permanently change his life. With high hopes that his Mellon contact would help him secure a job at the Schweitzer Hospital, he immediately set out for Deschapelles, seventy miles north of Port-au-Prince, and applied for a job at the hospital. But that didn't work out either; again disappointed, he headed back to Port-au-Prince. I always have a little chuckle when Bill Clinton introduces Paul to a crowd and says that when he asked Chelsea if she knew who Paul Farmer was, she replied, "Of course, Dad, he is our generation's Albert Schweitzer."

So instead of finding work in Africa, his first choice, or at Schweitzer Hospital, his second choice, Paul took a volunteer position at a small organization called Eye Care Haiti. Based in Port-au-Prince, Eye Care Haiti has mobile outreach clinics in rural areas, and Paul was sent to Mirebalais, a town in the Central Plateau. He worked in a clinic only a few miles

from the site where, thirty years later, Paul and his Partners In Health colleagues would build a three-hundred-bed, state-of-the art, Harvard-affiliated teaching hospital.

In retrospect, 1983 turned out to be a year that would have long-lasting significance for Paul, not only because it marked his first trip to Haiti, but perhaps even more importantly, because of several lifelong relationships he formed during this time. The chance meeting of Paul Farmer and Ophelia Dahl at a dilapidated building in Mirebalais, where they were both volunteering at the eye care clinic, was the start of an extraordinary friendship that has endured for over thirty years and a long-term partnership that, in time, would change the face of the global health world and bear fruit in the lives of millions of poor people Paul and Ophelia will never meet on this earth.

Ophelia was eighteen years old; her father had shipped her off to Haiti from her home in England to do some volunteer work that would broaden her horizons. Her father, Roald Dahl, was a much-celebrated author, and her mother was Patricia Neal, an Academy Award–winning actress. Ophelia had a complicated family life, and the time away from home was an opportunity for her to gain some independence and figure out what the future might hold for her. As chronicled in some detail in *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, the first incarnation of Paul and Ophelia's relationship was a serious romantic involvement that spanned almost a decade.

The backdrop for the development of their relationship was the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, politically unstable from years under the Duvalier dictatorship, which took a terrible toll on practically every aspect of life in Haiti. Ophelia found Paul, five years her senior, to be an intriguing and attractive person. She liked his outgoing personality and was impressed by his serious efforts to

understand Haiti from an anthropological perspective and his passionate ideas about how to change the circumstances of the poor. For his part, Paul liked Ophelia's sometimes bawdy sense of humor and her willingness to engage in deep conversation, and he was no doubt taken by her beauty and innocence. Young and without any responsibilities, they began to spend a lot of time together, exploring Haiti and trying to interpret their shared experience.

Ophelia returned to England for a time, thinking—no doubt influenced by Paul—that perhaps she would become a doctor too. She would eventually return to Haiti in the summers to work with Paul on projects in Cange and joined him in Boston when Paul started medical school at Harvard. They were a committed couple who got along well, and for several years they envisioned a life together organized around the shared goal of working to improve the lives of the destitute poor. But Ophelia would eventually turn down Paul's proposal of marriage when she realized that she was not cut out for a life with a doctor whose total dedication to the poor would always come first. Paul was devastated when Ophelia decided against marrying him, and Ophelia was sad too, but she was wise enough to know that in the end, they would both be miserable. They parted for some time after their broken engagement, but while Ophelia knew she could not make a life with Paul as his wife, she very much wanted a friendship with Paul, for she believed in him and in the work he was doing. Over time, Paul and Ophelia's relationship developed into an enduring friendship and, eventually, a legendary partnership that finds its expression in serving the poor through their work together at Partners In Health, where Ophelia served as executive director for twenty-five years until 2015, when she turned the day-to-day operations over to their esteemed colleague and friend,

Dr. Gary Gottlieb. Ophelia, ever dedicated to the world's poor, still serves full-time at Partners In Health as chair of the board of directors.

In her 2006 commencement address at her alma mater, Wellesley College, Ophelia told the graduates something of her experience working with Paul to start Partners In Health: "We didn't have a budget or a strategy. . . . As the number of patients and their ailments grew, we expanded the services, raising more money until the clinic became a hospital, the classroom a school, and the entity we referred to as 'the project' became Partners In Health. . . . So feel free to start very small, but allow yourself to imagine very expansively."[4]

Starting Small, Imagining Expansively

And that is just what Paul did: he started small but was imagining expansively. After his volunteer work at the eye clinic ended, he traveled around Haiti, hitchhiking or catching a ride on one of the brightly painted Haitian tap-tap buses, taking it all in, quickly forming opinions, imagining how things could be different. He knew he was seeing firsthand the "social inequality" he had read about in textbooks at Duke. As he told anthropologist Barbara Rylko-Bauer in an interview, "By the time I got to Haiti, the idea of being a dispassionate neutral observer was dead to me."[5]

While working as a volunteer at a hospital in Léogâne, he witnessed a horrible medical crisis that awoke in him an intense sense of moral outrage followed by a strong motivation to act.[6] One evening, a young pregnant woman, desperately ill with malaria and in severe respiratory distress, was brought into the hospital. The doctor told the woman's sister that the woman needed a blood transfusion to save her life and suggested that the sister go to a blood bank in

Port-au-Prince and buy the blood needed to save her sister's life. But her family did not have the money. Paul tried to raise some money by begging around the hospital complex, but he could only come up with fifteen dollars, which was not enough to cover the cost of the blood *and* transportation to Port-au-Prince. Paul stood with the devastated family and the hospital staff, helpless, as the woman and her unborn baby died. The woman's family thanked Paul for trying to help, which only made him feel worse. But it was something that the woman's sister said to him that just crushed him. "This is terrible. You can't even get a blood transfusion if you are poor." Sobbing, she kept repeating, "*Tout moun se moun, tout moun se moun*," which in Haitian Creole means "We are all humans, we are all humans."[7]

In what would become his standard practice over the years, Paul's outrage drove him to action. He decided to try to help the hospital build its own blood bank, so that a tragedy like this would never happen again. Thus began Paul's first foray into fundraising. In the years ahead, he would raise untold millions of dollars, but this first attempt, through asking family and the parents of some friends from Duke, netted a few thousand dollars. He enthusiastically and boldly went to the hospital leadership and told them he had raised the funds to build a blood bank at their hospital. They probably thought he was a bit cheeky, as well as obviously clueless about the way things work, when he told them that he wanted the blood bank to be free of charge. After they let him know in no uncertain terms that the blood bank would not be free, he left with a curt good-bye, filled with outrage. This was a watershed moment for Paul. Standing outside the hospital that had just dismissed him, he made a promise to himself: *I am going to build my own hospital where the poor receive good health care free of cost*. To say

that he made good on his promise is the understatement of all time.

Before his time in Léogâne, Paul had briefly connected with Fr. Fritz Lafontant, another religious person who would come to figure prominently in his personal history. Fr. Fritz, an energetic and determined Anglican priest, and his charming wife, Yolande, fondly called Mamito, had settled in the Central Plateau, where they ran a medical clinic in Mirebalais and some modest programs in a squatter settlement in Cange, a village about twelve miles from Mirebalais. Twelve miles sounds nearby, but the roads were not paved, so it was a rough and bouncy drive over dirt roads that could take hours, especially in the rainy season when the river flooded. The lives of the people in Cange had been destroyed when their land was flooded by a well-intended development project gone awry—the building of a hydroelectric dam in the 1950s. Paul has often remarked that he thought he had grown up poor until he got to Haiti and saw what real poverty was like. When the valley flooded, the people of Cange lost their homes and their livelihoods as farmers: their lives were utter misery, with crude lean-tos for housing, no stable food or water source, and virtually no medical care or educational or job opportunities. They simply had no access to the goods and services that make human flourishing possible.

Fr. Fritz and Mamito welcomed Paul, seeing in him great promise and quickly realizing that his drive and energy would make him a good partner in their work. They were solidly behind his idea of building a hospital where the poor could receive good medical care free of charge. Paul's first assignment as a volunteer was taking vital signs at their medical clinic in Mirebalais. Like all of the other clinics Paul had visited around Haiti, the clinic was a dismal place lacking

most, if not all, of the tools of the trade necessary to make it a decent health care center. During his time there, Paul mostly learned the way a medical clinic should *not* operate. But this did not depress him; instead, it motivated him to do what was necessary to improve the situation.

With the blessing of Fr. Fritz, Paul turned his attention to Cange and began to formulate modest plans to build a health care system there that would include other social supports like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and giving clean water to the thirsty. He started planting trees, as the land had been denuded, its forests chopped down for cooking fuel. If you go to Cange today, you will see a beautiful, lush green valley, filled with tall trees planted by Paul some thirty years ago. Paul stayed for the rest of the year, waiting to hear from medical schools, and it was Fr. Fritz who handed him his acceptance letter from Harvard Medical School. Paul briefly toyed with the idea of staying in Haiti, where the work was so immediate and compelling, but Fr. Fritz insisted otherwise, explaining to Paul that his medical training would make him much more useful in the long run. And so, in the fall of 1984, Paul left Haiti for Cambridge, Massachusetts, to begin a joint MD-PhD program.

The Harvard-Haiti Pilgrimage

One might say that during Paul's time as a student at Harvard Medical School, his mind was in Massachusetts but his heart was in Haiti. For many years, as he completed his education and residency, he shuttled back and forth between Haiti and Harvard, often leaving Boston on Thursday, making the ten-hour trek to Cange via Miami and Port-au-Prince, and returning late on Sunday night. Paul enjoyed the academic life, his grades were excellent, and Haiti was a

perfect training ground for the kind of medical work he planned to do. But this was yet another "negative contrast experience," for in a matter of hours, he bounced between two opposing realities that revealed the striking differences between the "haves" and the "have-nots" of this world. At Harvard, Paul was surrounded by people following their dreams, exercising their personal agency, taking advantage of endless opportunities, and—of course—taking for granted a safe place to live, endless food choices, and access to modern medical care. In Haiti, Paul was surrounded by people scrambling to eke out a marginal existence, never even daring to dream of exercising their personal agency, instead weeping with shame because they were unable to come up with a few dollars to pay the school fees for their children. Their personhood was truncated: they lived in leaking, one-room lean-tos, worried daily about finding something to eat and safe water to drink, and stood in the beating sun for hours waiting for entry into a subpar medical clinic that was likely not to have the diagnostics or medications needed for treatment.

Paul handled the back-and-forth pretty well. He was a serious student, intellectually gifted, and he applied himself to his studies in medicine and anthropology, motivated by the expectation that he would apply the training and skills he was receiving to help improve the lives of the poor Haitians with whom he was now living and working. He liked Boston well enough, but Haiti was his "True North" where he felt most at home. The progress he saw unfolding on his projects was rewarding, and he had begun to strongly identify with the Haitian people. By nature, Paul has a cheerful disposition, and this helped a lot, but the ongoing Haiti-Harvard commute was not easy. Sometimes it took its toll, and a quiet anger would simmer right underneath the